

August 9.89

Dear Stuart and Scott,

The big mailing bowled me over, yesterday noon. I settled down to reading it all at once, and ran through it again in the evening. I need not have written my niece, "Who are these Gentling gents? Tell me more. What do they want of me? There is no free lunch." But I see, upon studying your "lineaments," which say more than a few thousand words might do, and on considering your early addiction at age 13, we are simply sharing the same needle. I was trapped at age 41, *de bien*; but the year, 1947, was not so far from the mid-1950s, your own time. However that may be, I am certain that nothing in my own life has ever taken me over in such a way or held me hostage, seemingly for good. (I do love that picture of you together with the so very eloquent skull.)

I want to get this off before the BOOK arrives and knocks me unconscious for a while. The logistics frightened me until I figured that a TV table will hold it and let me roll it over to my oblong dinette table when I want to show and share it, or just pore over it. The little promo brochure is handsome! I can't get over how much expertise there is in the publishing arts, around you there, all of it so superbly orchestrated by the two of you. But I am bewildered by the number of probable choices that remain for bringing much more public awareness through the media. The classic, lasting qualities of the BOOK matter far more than ^{W3411} the flash in the pan. Still, droves of people who may not yet know about it would dearly love to!

My admiration for the candid way you wring out one obsession for all it's worth, then move on to another, no less absorbing, is overwhelming. I understand this well, because I have shuttled between Audubon and Hicks for nearly forty years, the former asking far more of me, owing to the immense camouflage and distortion of truth and my discovery of more and more material over the years. Both preoccupations began during my more than 30 years in New York. Hicks gained momentum while I was spending a year of work with the American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia. I took him up again in 1975, in justice to the gradual surfacing of more and more of his paintings, particularly his better and later ones. The search for the sources of his compositions was like big game hunting, I suppose, and rewarding too.

You didn't know about H. & L.'s sale. I didn't know anything about Mrs. Low until your letter (and the xerox of hers to you), except for her appearance in the Abbeville Press catalog in the same issue with me and my titles there. That squib didn't tell me that she had taken up Fries for repairs and additions, etc. Abbeville is like that. It gave the inventory of Fries's book to buyers of their fake Folio, as the prize in the crackerjack box. I wonder that Mrs. L. thinks of Ord as a "brilliant" ornithologist; she should look again. Her adventure at tea has served to drive off my anxiety to offer my drawing to her daughter's unnamed friend. I note her anxiety to extract more information from you for that friend, as if unaware that the grackle that you cherished was sacrificed ~~for~~ "the realization of a dream" (Audubon's words for his Folio). Her ambiguity may not pain you, but it does me--and it gives off something of the narrowness of the new owner and reinforces the suspicion that the grackle will be on the auction block again some day--instead of in some deserving and appropriate public institution. Amen to that. I have not seen the Low book. I laugh that she will "check out" the anemic Rider drawing and the forged "Audubon" signatures in such a

magisterial spirit. I know that Bonaparte didn't write the name; his handwriting was almost illegible. It should be easy for Mrs. Spaw, librarian at the ANS, Phila, to dig up some specimens of Lawson's hand, and the APS has plenty of Ord examples. Finally, I remain consumed with curiosity as to whom the drawing passed from Ord--the whole provenance. Surely Cresswell and Lane of the OPS know where they got it, and where that person got it. But dealers are notoriously evasive as you know, and apparently schizy about being caught short. I wrote to ask Bill Reese who bought the 1826 journal and asked whether he knew who now owns the grackle. No reply thus far. His Maryland family residence is awash with framed B of A Folio prints, even the baths!--according to an Annapolis professor whom I know. Could he be the buyer???? --or someone in the family. He lives in New Haven whose paper his mother owned or still owns. I can imagine how C. and Lane must feel about the grackle, quite a big pratfall for them if one thinks about it. From the above you will see that I'll never be writing to Mrs. Low.

I think Carole Slatkin (if she is unwed) must be the baby her mother Mrs. Charles Slatkin was ~~receiving~~ when she spent most of her days --often with him--in the Brooklyn Museum library on an art book. If she is 49-ish or so, this could be. I don't know what became of the S.S. They did publish, about then, a large book on American parinting. I was in chains there until WWII set me free and sent me to Ireland and China

I sent the bio and the Journal the night before your big envelope came. You should have them next week sometime. Inasmuch as the Journal is inscribed to you both, I wonder whether Scott might not rather have a copy of the 1964 edition of JJA, with a long inscription about it in relation to its sequel--and because it contains an "Art Miscellany" (now dated by changes of ownership at points)? It would be the only such copy around. I think I'll take for granted that he'd prefer to have that one, but shall hesitate until sure.

Need I say that you will be hearing from me as soon as I have regained consciousness, on what will be a very memorable day?

Gratefully, you can be sure,

Alia

But to whom shall my copy of your *chêf-doeuvre* go, be bequeathed--to what deserving and final repository????????? Help, please.

the late
P.S., too; Morris Tyler, /great-great-grandson of JJA, dismissed--long ago--

the grackle drawings that bear the phony signatures, as did I. It was their phoniness that drove me mad and convinced me that somewhere the real drawing existed. I agree fully with your ultimate conclusion that none of the drawing in Bonaparte's work is by Audubon. Except the egg. I was wrong in 1964 about "the first published drawing," but have righted that. As far as I am concerned ~~Lizars's~~ trial flight holds the honors.
(Lawson's)

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